

INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS

“Talk is a powerful teaching tool when it comes to vocabulary development, so we need to be intentional about using new words with young children in our classrooms” (Wright, 2021, p. 21). When children are exposed to new (and more complex) words during daily conversations (ex. “Let’s ‘observe’ the weather” or “Let’s ‘compare’ these items”), children will begin to understand and ‘try out’ these words as well.

READING ALOUD

Reading aloud to primary students exposes them to a wide range of words in context. Teachers and caregivers can select books with rich vocabulary and engage students in discussions about the meanings of unfamiliar words. Reading and enjoying a book together provides a rich opportunity to pause strategically for vocabulary learning. During a read aloud, children can consider words and concepts they may not access as independent readers yet.

INDEPENDENT READING

Prior to independent reading, or during conferencing, teachers can offer children strategies for finding the meaning of new vocabulary, such as considering multiple meanings, noticing spelling patterns, and recognizing common word parts. (Wright, 2021, p. 96)

WORD GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Interactive word games, such as word puzzles, charades, or word bingo, can make learning vocabulary fun and engaging for primary students. These activities encourage active participation and help reinforce word meanings in a playful manner.

USE OF VISUAL AIDS

Provide visual support for primary students through the use of sound walls and anchor charts when learning and reviewing new vocabulary words. Include pictures, definitions, and examples to enhance understanding and retention.

CONTEXTUAL LEARNING

Teaching vocabulary in context helps primary students understand how words are used in real-life situations. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to encounter new words in meaningful contexts, such as through literature, discussions, or hands-on activities and play.

WORD STUDY AND WORD FAMILIES

Introducing primary students to word study activities, such as exploring word families, prefixes, suffixes, and root words, can deepen their understanding of word meanings and relationships. This approach helps students recognize patterns and make connections between words, facilitating vocabulary acquisition.

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

Direct instruction of specific words and their meanings is important for vocabulary development. Teachers can introduce new words through explicit instruction, including definitions, examples, and opportunities for students to use the words in sentences or contexts.

MULTIPLE EXPOSURES

Repetition and multiple exposures to words are essential for vocabulary retention. Teachers and caregivers can incorporate vocabulary words into various activities and contexts over time to reinforce learning and help students internalize new vocabulary.

WORD CONTEXT CLUES

Teaching primary students how to use context clues to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words is a valuable skill. Encouraging students to look for context clues, such as surrounding words, illustrations, or sentence structure, helps them become independent word learners.

WORD JOURNALS OR VOCABULARY NOTEBOOKS

Providing primary students with opportunities to record and reflect on new vocabulary words in journals or notebooks can support vocabulary development. Students can write definitions, create sentences, draw pictures, or make personal connections to deepen their understanding of words.

WRITING

“Word choice is critical for writing...We want children to feel like writers, using precise words to share ideas. When children write, they have the opportunity to use and practice all the fantastic words that they know” (Wright, 2021, p. 108). Prior to independent writing, or during conferencing, teachers can offer strategies for trying out new vocabulary, such as encouraging spelling approximations, noticing multiple meanings of words, and modelling attention to careful word choice (Wright, 2021, p. 114-119).